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THE PROGRESS OF SOUTHERN EDUCATION

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There have been four great obstacles to educational progress in North Carolina :

1. The negro, enfranchised against the protest of the people, who were forced against their will to pay a tax to educate him.
2. Poverty—grinding poverty—following war and reconstruction, such as this generation cannot know.
3. The lack of qualified teachers and the lack of inducement to capable men and women to become teachers.
4. High mountain ranges and numerous water courses in the west, where people live far apart and where compact school districts are impossible, and great pocosins, or swamps, in portions of the east, which present the same barriers to consolidation in many parts of the coast region that the mountain ranges present in the west.

These four obstacles : but the greatest of these has been, is now, and must be, at least in this generation, the negro. He has been the lion in the path, the ever present and often insurmountable obstacle to public education. There are those who assert that many opponents of taxation for public education on other grounds use the expenditure of money for negro education as a pretext, and that if no share of public money went to educating the negro they would still oppose taxes for public education. That may be true with some, but the naked truth is, that much of the money from taxation—I had almost said the bulk of it—that has gone to negro education, has been given against the judgment of Southern taxpayers. Here, where we are seeking to get at the real facts, so that the best results may follow, there is no need to look at things except just as they are—to paint the picture as it really is—warts, freckles and all.

Is it surprising that the Southern people, in the ashes of a poverty that pride largely concealed from the world, resented the enfranchisement of their slaves? Is it surprising that they cried out against being taxed to educate the children of negroes, newly freed, when the losses of war sent their own children, unused to manual work, into the fields to perform the coarsest labors? When

zealous women from the North, with the missionary instinct to uplift the negro, came South and themselves taught the negroes and, in some cases, mingled with them upon terms of social equality, is it strange that the Southern people felt that these teachers had come South to put the bottom rail on top? And when, in some instances, their teaching seemed at first to produce among some of the worst young negroes a vicious attitude, is Southern hostility to negro education surprising? When the statement is published upon the authority of leading teachers that the census reports show the negro to be four and a half times more criminal in New England, where the negroes are better educated than in the black belt where illiteracy is greatest, is it a matter of astonishment that men declare to-day that negro education is a failure?

The marvel of it all is, not that many Southern people cried out against paying taxes to educate negroes, believing that it did them no good, but that notwithstanding their utter disbelief in its good results or their skepticism of its value, they have gone on, year after year, spending more and more money to educate the negro children. Nor must it ever be forgotten that all over the South, before 1860, good women had taught slaves to read and write, so that when emancipation came, there were not a few negroes who had been, in an educational sense, made fit for suffrage.

The Southerners believed then, they believe now, they always will believe, with Henry Ward Beecher, "We should make the negro worthy first before giving him suffrage." Tourgee's hindsight, better than his foresight, caused him to prove that in the contrary policy pursued, the attempt was to make bricks without straw. There are many Southern people who believe thoroughly in educating the negro, and believe that it helps him and the whole country, and their unselfish efforts in his behalf are beyond all praise. There are thousands and tens of thousands who do not believe in it at all, and who are frank to say that, in their judgment, it does nobody good. There are others who, seeing the examples of negroes who have been helped by education, and being surrounded by negroes whose smattering of education has done them harm, are halting between two opinions. There are others—and in this class I believe most of the thoughtful people of the South are to be found—who feel that, whatever may be the result, they dare not shut the door of hope and opportunity which education may open to any people

anywhere—the negro in the South, the Indian in the West, the Filipino in Manila. They do not expect of education that it will change the negro rapidly. They know to the contrary. They hope, they believe, they trust, that eventually it will prove beneficial, because they have faith that light and knowledge will surely bless wherever they abound.

The eloquent Southern Methodist bishop, George F. Pierce, regarded by Toombs as the most eloquent of Georgians, was once asked if he believed that the heathen would be saved if the Christians refused to send the Gospel to them. "It is not a question to you, my friend," replied the bishop, "whether the heathen will be saved if you do not help to send them the Gospel. That is God's business. He commands you to send the Gospel. The question for you to consider is: 'Will you be saved if you disobey God's command to send it?'"

With this last class the question is not: "Can I demonstrate by statistics, by mathematics, by investigation, to my perfect satisfaction, whether negro education is worth what it costs?" The question is: "Would I dare to say to any human being, 'You shall not have the chance which education may give of improving your mental, moral and physical welfare'?"

Since 1870, according to Hon. W. T. Harris, United States Commissioner of Education (Report of U. S. Com. of Ed., 1889-1900, volume II, page 2501), the South has spent \$109,000,000 for negro education. North Carolina alone has spent \$5,380,770.74. Now if this money had been spent by people who sincerely believed it was being well invested, these figures would not seem so large, but when it is remembered that the majority of the men who paid this money either disbelieved entirely in the education of the negro, were skeptical as to its value, or favored it as Bishop Pierce said men must consider foreign missions, it is seen to be, all things considered, the most remarkable and astounding investment of money that any people ever made.

The second obstacle to educational progress in the South has been poverty.

For almost a century most of the savings of the Southern people, most of the South's surplus of wealth, had been invested in slaves. In 1860 the reported value of slaves was \$60,000,000. If, without any devastation of war, any loss of earning capacity by the men

killed or wounded in battle, or diseased by exposure incident to camp life, this immense sum of money had been taken from the South, it would have been wretchedly poor. Add to the loss of the accumulations and savings of many years, the losses in other property, which the vanquished must always bear in war, the even greater calamity in the death and maiming of its strongest and best bread-winners, and some faint idea of the poverty which the South faced in 1865 may be grasped. This utter, abject poverty, involving the denial of the common necessities, can never be known or appreciated.

But the South is still poor. I know that this will be denied by those who take a superficial view or think all the South is as rich as the Carolina truck gardens, the Virginia cities, the Texas oil wells, or the Alabama coal fields. The South is growing richer every day. It is developing its resources, its young men have gone to work in the factory, the mine, the field; on every hand you see evidences of prosperity. The future of the South industrially is assured. Out of the poverty of war, out of the disaster of reconstruction, by twenty years of well-directed industry, it has built large cities and established great industries. But, while it has done wonders in these short years and laid the foundation for greater prosperity, the South is relatively still poor. The *Southern Educator* says that 1,000,000 people live in log houses in Georgia. In every state there are thousands whose incomes are so small as to make everything beyond the common necessities of life impossible. There are fewer of these every year, thanks to the building of railroads which open new markets and avenues of wealth, and the varied industrial development which is blessing the South. But it will be generations before the South catches up with other sections of the Republic, and recovers from the losses of war and reconstruction. But she will do it. Her sons are strong, robust, industrious, confident, self-reliant, ready and willing to work with head and hand. In the face of all the progress it is making, I know it is not popular to say that the South is poor, but those who are acquainted with the rural conditions know that, while grinding poverty has passed, the bulk of the people have succeeded as yet in making but small accumulations.

The third obstacle has been the lack of trained teachers and the lack of incentive to capable men to become teachers.

Most of the male teachers between 1865 and 1880 were Confederate soldiers, many of them teaching to secure bread. They had gone into the army from schools in which they had but begun their education. With one leg or one arm gone, they were unfit, when the war was over, for the manual labor which their comrades undertook. Equipped with meagre education, but rigid discipline, they taught the children the three "r's," and in the recess delighted them with stories of the war.

I knew such a teacher, big of heart and brave as a lion, who left a leg at Gettysburg, who was one of the most popular teachers in his community. He knew how to maintain discipline, he could teach, and teach thoroughly—up to partial payments—and he could describe a battle with such graphic vividness as to make the hair of his pupils stand on end. For twenty dollars a month, for three months in the year, that noble soldier was the pioneer post-bellum leader in public education in his neighborhood. He would not shine in a teachers' institute, but he taught the rudiments thoroughly and sowed the seed from which this generation is reaping.

The short terms and low salaries have not encouraged men and women to become teachers, but the call to teach has in every year been heard and heeded by thousands, who have found a compensation that is priceless in the love and gratitude of their students. And so, though the pay has been small, the schools have been manned by teachers worth ten times the salary that they received. Better normal instruction has provided better teachers, the growing prosperity has multiplied graded schools, which have offered better inducements to teachers, and this obstacle of the lack of trained teachers is year by year disappearing.

People who live in compact communities can have little appreciation of the obstacle to adequate public schools to be found in a sparse population. In the mountains and in the low country, the population is widely scattered, and it is where the people live farthest apart the least progress has been made. But even where the environment makes strongest against progress, the people are becoming aroused to the necessity of better schools and longer terms, and are bridging swamps and climbing mountains to give their sons and daughters a better chance in life.

So much for the obstacles. We are already—the world is already—familiar with the statistics of illiteracy, the figures showing

appropriations for schools, and the general spirit of enthusiasm and hope that pervades the South. I have dwelt upon the serious obstacles because I have often thought that in some quarters the South has been too harshly judged by men who read nothing but statistics.

I am more familiar with North Carolina—its improvement as indicated by official figures and in the changed and improved and improving public sentiment—and will confine myself to the development in that state, which has the distinction of being a leader in this and other progressive educational movements. The story of North Carolina fairly tells the story of progress of all the Southern states.

I can remember when there was not a single city, town or village or a school district in North Carolina that levied a special tax for public schools, and at that time the general school tax provided a fund that afforded only the most inefficient short-term schools.

The first town that voted a local tax for graded schools was Greensboro in 1874. To-day there are seventy-eight local tax districts that support their public schools by public taxation, quite a number of country districts are doing so, and, within the past year, a large number of towns and school districts have voted a local tax to establish graded schools. The legislature of 1903 passed more special acts for establishing graded schools and erecting public school buildings than ever before in the history of the state.

But these figures in themselves do not adequately convey the real progress. Many school districts have been consolidated—that work is going on every month, wisely and rapidly—and this is all preparatory to an accelerated increase in the number of districts that will, within the next few years, vote a special tax to improve the public schools in village and in rural district, for almost every town of any importance now has its graded school, supported by taxation.

A concrete example in one growing town will illustrate the new and better condition in the whole state. It was my good fortune to grow up in the village in eastern North Carolina that had the best private schools and academies in that section of the state. Twenty-five years ago, in the town of Wilson, there was a flourishing woman's seminary and a prosperous academy for boys and young men. They attracted students from twenty counties, and had famous instructors and splendid wooden buildings. But the public school,

open only about two months, during the vacation of the private schools, was taught in an abandoned carriage factory. The teachers were good, but the crowded classes and short terms made the public school largely a failure. Few parents who could pay tuition thought of depending upon them. A magnificent brick building, costing \$50,000, has been erected for a useful and strong denominational college. The people have recently built a \$35,000 brick building for its excellent public graded school for white children. Commodious and well-equipped buildings had previously been erected for the graded schools for the negro children.

The change in most other communities has been even more marked, for in many there were only indifferent and small private schools, before the establishment of graded schools. In those a transformation greater and more uplifting than any array of figures would indicate has been wrought, for the influence of these schools of democracy has touched every phase of community life to bless it.

The progress in what we call higher education has been most gratifying. In 1875 the doors of the State University—the oldest and one of the foremost institutions of learning in the South, with an illustrious history—were closed. Only one college had a dollar of endowment and that had been seriously impaired by war. In 1875 only about three hundred young men were matriculated in all the colleges. To-day there are not less than twenty-five hundred.

Within the past fifteen years the state has established two great industrial institutions—the A. and M. College for white boys at Raleigh and the A. and M. College for colored boys at Greensboro. The aggregate appropriations and expenditures at both have been three-quarters of a million dollars. At Greensboro the state has established for women the State Normal and Industrial College, the success of which has been almost phenomenal. It represents the expenditure of more than half a million dollars in ten years. The appropriation from the state treasury has been increased from \$12,500 to \$40,000 a year. The state has added largely to the institution for the blind at Raleigh, and erected commodious and modern buildings for a model school for the deaf and dumb children at Morgantown, costing \$200,000. Private benefaction has constructed five new buildings at the University, at a cost of over \$200,000. The appropriations from the state treasury for the Uni-

versity, which reopened in 1876 with a state appropriation of \$7,500 per year, have been increased to \$37,500 per year. Eight normal schools for the training of teachers for the negro schools are maintained by the state at locations convenient and accessible.

The private academies and preparatory schools (North Carolina from its earliest history has always been blessed with a few private schools worthy to rank with the best in England or New England) have multiplied in numbers and attendance, doing a great and needed work, filling the gap between the public schools and the colleges.

The denominational colleges have gone forward steadily and rapidly. The endowment in one alone, Trinity College, coming almost wholly from two men—father and son—has grown to something like half a million. Wake Forest has increased to a quarter of a million; Davidson to a quarter of a million; Elon, during the past year, received a handsome donation. The endowments in the denominational colleges for women have not been so great, but these colleges have shown a growth that tells mightily the story of the belief in educating women that has been the distinguishing educational characteristic of the state during the past ten years. New colleges for women have been established and grown to great usefulness in a single year.

Among the most important forward steps that the state has lately taken, I must name three.

1. The legislature has now for four years made an appropriation of \$100,000 a year, out of the general funds, to be applied to the schools in the poorer counties whose revenues are not sufficient to bring their school terms up to the constitutional requirement.

2. It has made appropriations of \$12,500 for free rural libraries in connection with the public schools, which, supplemented by the counties and private subscriptions, will amount to \$37,500.

3. The general assembly, which adjourned last month, recognizing that the pressing need in public education is better schoolhouses, upon the recommendation of the state's able and wise superintendent of schools, one of the first educators in wisdom and in executive ability in America to-day, set aside the sum of \$200,000 and all funds hereafter arising from the sale of thousands of acres of public lands belonging to the state, to be a "Permanent Loan Fund for Building and Improving Public Schoolhouses."

The State Board of Education is directed to lend this money at 4 per cent to school districts which have not the money to build schoolhouses, to be repaid in ten annual instalments. This sum will be used to supplement local appropriations and contributions. If it could be doubled and the entire school fund, a large part of which has necessarily been used to build schoolhouses, could be used exclusively to employ teachers, the good result which we confidently expect in ten years, would be accomplished within one year. I believe this is the most important step taken in public education in any Southern state. You cannot secure a full attendance without comfortable schoolhouses. Good schoolhouses must be at the foundation of all permanent progress in public education. The loan fund established by North Carolina has the germ of the best work possible of early accomplishment that philanthropists and legislators can undertake.

These facts tell in outline the story of the educational progress in North Carolina, as far as it can be told by brick, mortar, statutes and appropriations. These are the visible signs of the revival that has, like a living fire, touched the minds and hearts of the people of the state. But as the spirit is always superior to the material, these facts and figures cannot convey the full story of the wonderful progress that this generation has witnessed. That story will be found in the newer life of intellectual and industrial activity that dominates the South to-day and that will lead it into larger fields in the days that are to come.

North Carolina's contribution to the educational revival is found mainly within the state, for the true Tar-heel is ever mindful of the injunction, "Beginning at Jerusalem." Perhaps we stay there too long and preach too much only to the saints. But North Carolina has furnished educational leaders, not only for its own schools and colleges, but has furnished educational leaders also for the South and elsewhere. Page, of New York; Alderman, of Louisiana; Branson, of Georgia; Pell, of South Carolina; Barringer, of Virginia; Houston, of Texas, all prominently connected with the Southern Education Conference and its work, are natives of North Carolina, while Woodrow Wilson spent his boyhood in Wilmington; and Dabney and Claxton, of Tennessee; D. B. Johnson, of South Carolina; J. D. Eggleston, Jr., of Virginia, and other leaders in this movement, began the work of their early manhood and retained their citizen-

ship in North Carolina long enough to be indoctrinated with proper ideas of educational leadership. Its present governor, Charles B. Aycock, and Georgia's foremost citizen, Hoke Smith, were both born in North Carolina. Among public leaders in the educational progress of to-day, the names of these two North Carolinians "lead all the rest."

To-day, with this backward glance at what has been accomplished in spite of the negro burden, the swamps, and mountains, the sparseness of population, the lack of trained teachers, and poverty, North Carolinians, having come up out of great tribulations, and rejoicing that they have reached *Appi Forum*, thank God and take courage. That good state is happy in that, though the harvest is great, it is ripe for the sickle and the laborers are not few.

Among the causes of congratulation to-day is the fact that at last the South has the sympathy and the co-operation of the most patriotic and broad-minded men of the Republic—men who are moved by the highest motives and the purest patriotism in their interest in Southern education.